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ABSTRACT

The political, cultural, and social factors that have influenced English language teaching in the People's Republic of China's colleges are examined. First, a brief history of English teaching in China is presented, beginning in the mid-19th century and focusing on the 1949 Revolution, the 1960 Sino-Soviet split, and the the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76. As part of the current Four-Modernization movement, English instruction now begins at the elementary level and is required in almost all Chinese colleges. To meet the demand outside the schools, instruction is also broadcast on national and local stations several times a day. The influence of sociocultural factors in teaching materials, methodology, teacher education, and learner behavior is discussed, especially at the higher education level and in relation to the traditional Chinese educational system. Changes resulting from visiting foreigners teaching English in the country are also noted. Continuing efforts to bring new materials, methodology, and cross-cultural communication to China and to try to tailor English instruction to the specific situations in which it is taught are recommended. (MSE)

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English Teaching in China's Colleges

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English Teaching in China's Colleges

Introduction

Language is related to a society. A country's language policy is determined by political and economic factors within that community. Like the instruction of other foreign languages, English teaching in China has experienced ups and downs because of changing political and economic situations. English teaching has an important role in China's education today, because the English language is viewed by the Chinese as a tool in learning advanced science and technology from other countries, in promoting cultural and economic exchange with other countries and in furthering the mutual understanding between the Chinese people and people from other countries.

This paper is devoted to a discussion of the political, cultural and social factors which have influenced English teaching in China's colleges. To be more specific, the first part is to examine the relationship between the instruction of foreign languages and political policies by looking at the history of English teaching in China, especially after the 1949 revolution. The second part is more concerned with the social and cultural factors affecting English teaching techniques in China.

A Brief History of English Teaching in China

Semi-colonial and Semi-feudal Period

English teaching was first introduced in China in the mid-19th century when China was forced to open its door to the West. With the growing contact with the Westerners, learning and teaching English seemed to be necessary for many purposes, such as political negotiations and cultural as well as economic exchange. The relationship between the Western countries and China was hierarchical. Politically, technologically and economically, the Western

nations (mainly Britain) were in a dominant position; they wanted the Chinese people to adjust to their cultures and languages.

Before 1949, China's literacy rate was very low, consisting of only 10 per cent of the whole population. Only people of high social and economic status could afford to go to high school or college and receive a formal education. Since many high schools and colleges were run by foreigners, especially missionaries, English teaching was quite popular in big cities, where most of the schools were located. The textbooks used by many colleges were English. Thus, most college graduates had a fairly good command of the English language.

1949 Revolution

In 1949, when the Chinese Revolution drove all foreigners out of the country, the Chinese people had a bitter feeling about the oppression and exploitation they had suffered under the Western imperialists. The new Chinese government considered mission schools as tools used by the imperialists for cultural invasion. English had been taught to the Chinese in order to benefit the foreigners: a policy of enslavement. Moreover, many mission schools and colleges were closed down because of the departure of foreigners. Many intellectuals by this time could speak English, but between 1949 and 1960 English teaching was limited to only a few language institutes and colleges in big cities.

The international political situation following the Chinese Revolution also limited China's contact with the West. Because China became another communist country, many Western nations cut off their relations with "Red China". The political situation made China seek aid from the Soviet Union. As a result, the main contact China had with the outside world was with the

Soviet Union, some Eastern European countries, and some of the developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Since most of the foreign equipment, techniques and technicians were from the Soviet Union, there was a great demand to learn Russian rather than English. The teaching of Russian developed very rapidly in colleges and high schools throughout China in the 1950s.

Sino-Soviet Split

During the latter half of the 1960, attitudes toward English teaching began to change due to the Sino-Soviet split. On December 25, 1960, China's Youth published an editorial calling for an improved attitude towards the study of English, which said:

> Recently, we have received many letters from young readers who asked: "Why is English taught in middle schools?" Now, we give a simple answer as follows:
>
> Following the elevation of the international standing of our country, the intercourse between our people and the peoples of all other countries in the world has become increasingly frequent. With a view of developing friendly relations between our people and the peoples of other countries, and absorbing the scientific and technical achievements and all the useful experiences of the foreign countries, we are required to study all foreign languages. English is one of the most commonly used languages in the world. Over 200 million people of the whole world speak English as their native language; additionally, for historical reasons, English is extensively spoken in many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Hence, while mastering the Russian language, it is also absolutely necessary to study English and the language of other countries.

The reasons why China changed its attitude were quite complex. First, the more positive attitude toward English reflected the change in political situation at that time. When the People's Republic of China was established in 1949, most Western nations held a hostile attitude toward the communist government. The Soviet Union and other socialist countries, on the other

hand, recognized the government immediately. A treaty of friendship, alliance, and mutual assistance was signed on February 14, 1950 between China and the Soviet Union. According to this treaty, the U.S.S.R. was to aid China with technical information, loans, and equipment, which were badly needed for China's economic recovery. Having no contact with the West, China imported a great deal of techniques and equipment from the U.S.S.R. However, owing to ideological conflicts between the two communist parties, the relationship between the two countries deteriorated. In the mid-1960, Soviet experts were completely withdrawn from China; most of them left overnight, often with blueprints of key installations. This dealt a heavy blow to China's economic development. By the autumn of 1961, the conflict between China and the Soviet Union became more evident as the leaders of the two countries became openly critical of each other.

Second, the change of attitude toward English reflected the economic situation at that time. China realized through its failure in the Great Leap Forward (1958) that it was necessary for China to learn the advanced science and technology of the more developed countries for its economic development. The Great Leap Forward mobilized millions of people in the countryside in order to push agricultural production to even greater peaks by establishing people's communes. This mass campaign seemed to be successful at first. However, too much had been attempted too quickly, and soon the countryside was in disarray. The Chinese began to realize the importance of introducing advanced technology for China's economic development rather relying merely on manpower and revolutionary enthusiasm.

During the late 1950s, China's relations with the West started to improve in subtle ways. For several years after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union and some Eastern European countries had been China's

main trade partners. When the relations between China and the Soviet Union deteriorated, China shifted its trade partners. More and more business transactions were concluded with Japan, Canada, Australia, France and other Western countries. With the expansion of its contact with the West, China needed more people who could speak English.

Between 1961 and 1966, English teaching started to attract more attention and was introduced not only at the college but also at the high school level. At first, Russian and English received equal attention, but gradually, English study took a more important position. Many Chinese-English dictionaries, textbooks, English study journals, and grammar books were published during this period.

The 1949-1966 period was a great expansion of China's educational enterprise. At first, top priority was given to popularizing primary education. After 1961, more attention was given to raising the academic level of high school and college graduates. Foreign language teaching, especially English, developed very rapidly. Most colleges offered English courses to their students.

The Cultural Revolution

China's English teaching was greatly interfered by the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). The main purpose of the Cultural Revolution, according to the mass media then, was to prevent capitalist restoration in China. Education was one of the first targets of the Cultural Revolution. Most intellectuals were blamed as being part of the bourgeoisie. The first seventeen years of Chinese education after the 1949 revolution were criticized as having

perpetuated a new elite of intelligentsia. The teaching of English was even more fiercely criticized. English teachers were not only blamed as bourgeois intellectuals, but also labeled as worshippers of foreign capitalism, "running dogs of imperialism" or American spies. Most schools were closed down for a year or more; with colleges closed down from four to ten years. It was dangerous to be an intellectual during the Cultural Revolution.

English teaching in China was suspended during the Cultural Revolution for several years at different levels. When the teaching was renewed, both students and teachers were no longer interested in the study of the English language. The students faced the possibility of going to the countryside after their graduation and English naturally would have little to do with a future farming job. The teachers were afraid of being criticized again if they taught English too enthusiastically. During the Cultural Revolution, an "educational reform" was carried out throughout the country. Its essential objective was to place education at the service of proletarian policy and to combine education with productive work. Old English texts describing the life of people in English-speaking countries had nothing to do with the Chinese Revolution. Moreover, these texts were criticized as a means by which bourgeois intellectuals could praise the decadent lifestyle of capitalists and poison the minds of the Chinese young people. Most textbooks were written to suit the revolutionary needs of China and foreign language teaching was given minimum attention. The curriculum in every school was greatly narrowed to emphasize practical subjects.

In the early 1970s, with the evolution of international relations, English teaching once again started to be emphasized in China's education. China increased its contact with the outside world and Sino-American relations started to improve. As a result, more people needed to master the English language as an effective communication tool. English teaching has developed rapidly since the early 1970s. Still, owing to the interference of the

Cultural Revolution, it remained difficult to teach English before 1976. Students and teachers were overly cautious about the ideological factor tied to the learning of a foreign language; most of the language teaching and study was in strict agreement with political ideology or in close contact with production. People tended to be more concerned about avoiding political mistakes than realizing any academic achievements. It was not until 1976, which marked the end of the Cultural Revolution, that this phenomenon started to change.

The Four-Modernization Movement

After the Cultural Revolution, China started its nationwide modernization campaign. Education is considered as the foundation for this program. Therefore, teachers and students are encouraged to carry out academic study, especially in the fields of science and technology. China now intends to increase the speed of its economic development by learning the advanced technology from foreign countries. China is more willing to depend on certain types of foreign technology, foreign equipment and foreign trade. At the same time, China has set in motion plans for cultural exchange and tourist business. The demands for people trained in foreign languages have grown dramatically. English teaching has become the most popular foreign language studied and taught in China today. English teaching starts at the lementary level and continues at the secondary and college levels. English is required as a course in almost all colleges. To meet the demand outside of schools, it is taught through national and local stations broadcast English programs several times a day.

At present, college students who are not English majors are required to take English courses (usually four hours a week) during the first two years of their study in college. The main objective of English instruction to these

students, most of them study science and technology, is to help the students acquire the ability to read English journals and books in their field. For students who major in English, the program is usually intense. Students take English courses (twelve to sixteen hours a week) throughout their four years of study in the college. These students, upon the completion of their study, are supposed to have acquired English proficiency in various aspects, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation.

Although immense efforts have been given to English teaching and some success has been achieved, difficulties and problems still exist. These difficulties and problems need to be analyzed and solved. The following part of the paper is an attempt to analyze each aspect of English teaching in China's colleges by looking at the cultural, social and political factors which have influenced English teaching in China.

Sociocultural Factors Influencing English Teaching in China

Teaching Materials

Teaching materials serve as one of the important factors in successful language teaching. China has been working on this problems for many years. Ever since the early 1960s when the teaching of English began to draw more attention than the teaching of Russian, efforts have been made to compile English textbooks suitable for Chinese learners.

While discussing this problem, we have to bear in mind that China's social system and political ideology are different from those of the Western nations. For many years, because of political reasons, a direct transfer of Western teaching materials to China was unacceptable. The primary goal of

China's education is to help students not only to acquire knowledge but also to strengthen their consciousness. Textbooks were compiled with consideration of political factors. The long separation from the Western nations and the hostility Western nations held towards China's communist government in the 1950s and 1960s made it virtually impossible for China to obtain teaching materials from the West. For many years, English textbooks published in China contained a considerable number of translation versions of Chinese novels, historical events, and newspaper articles. The English written by native-speakers was introduced to Chinese learners through Western works of classical literature. Even this limited amount of exposure to Western culture was banned in the Cultural Revolution. Teaching materials consisted exclusively of texts which had some relation with Chinese revolution.

When China started its modernization program after the Cultural Revolution, greater attention was given to contact and exchange with foreign nations. English teaching has been emphasized in China's education. In recent years, many teaching materials have been compiled in China to satisfy the different needs of English learners. At the same time, a number of British and American EFL teaching materials have been used in many English language departments at colleges and foreign language institutes.

However, teaching materials from abroad have met an unusual situation in China. Some materials which have been successful with EFL learners in other countries have presented certain problems in China, one of the most notable being that of cultural relevance. As Allen and Spada (1982) pointed out, common themes cited in Western-produced EFL materials have little or no relevance to the Chinese context. Cashing cheques, shopping in supermarkets, meeting friends in discotheques, reminiscing about the rock 'n' roll era or the "hippie generation" are not cultural relevance points for the Chinese learners.

Further more, China is a socialist country, many of its values being quite different from those of the Western countries. Topics popular in the West, such as sudden wealth, sextual promiscuity, individual success, are not valued by the Chinese culture and are unacceptable by the learners. The Chinese society is working in a completely different way from the Western society; even looking for a job, looking for an apartment, buying a car or seeking a ride are very rare in Chinese people's daily life.

The Chinese have been concerned about the side-effect some Western materials have brought to Chinese young people and the weaknesses of some materials in meeting the needs of the Chinese learners. The Ministry of Education called for a special effort on the compilation of English teaching materials suitable for Chinese students. Some foreign ESL experts have also been working with the Chinese material writers to compile some EFL textbooks suitable for the Chinese learners (Allen & Spada, 1982).

Teaching Methodology

It has become increasingly apparent that teaching methodology is important in successful language learning. The goal of language teaching is to enable the learners to acquire the language; hence, the methods used in language teaching also need to be studied so that some effective ways can be found to reach the goal. Unlike ESL or EFL teaching in many other countries, China has conducted reletively little research in teaching methodology. The traditional grammar-translation method is still widely used in many colleges.

Many foreign teachers arriving in China were surprised to see that the methods in language teaching are "rigidly traditional" (T. Scovel, 1983). Attepts made to change this teaching method sometimes meet strong resistance in Chinese classrooms. This phenomenon should be analyzed from a historical

and cultural viewpoint. Some foreign teachers have explained the phenomenon as the influence of Chinese culture and the Chinese traditional system of education (Scovel, T. 1983; Scovel, J. 1983; Grabe & Mahon, 1981).

When English teaching was first introduced to China in the mid-1800s, it was learned by the grammar-translation method, which was popular then in educational systems of the West. Since the Chinese honor the tradition of the past, it appears that the emphasis on classical grammar during that period appealed to the Chinese. The Chinese have always emphasized the importance of grammatical accuracy in writing, which is the symbol of a well-educated scholar. Since the grammar-translation method seems to be a good way to acquire the knowledge of grammar and classics, many Chinese teachers consider this method as the best way of learning a foreign language.

If we consider the traditional education system in China, we will understand better why the grammar-translation method has been popular there. In ancient China, a scholar had to pass examinations at different levels to be qualified for the position of a government official. Most examinations included reading and understanding the classics which were believed to contain all the knowledge and truth a scholar needed to be a government official. Scholars were also required to write very well in the classical style. In order to pass the examinations, scholars spent years memorizing all the important classical works.

The educational system has changed, but many people's beliefs in this learning style have not changed. In the teaching of the Chinese language, children are usually encouraged or required to memorize the texts. Most adults believe that once children memorize the well-written texts, they will be able to produce faultless sentences as an unconscious habit. By the same token, students learning English are also required to memorize some of the Western classical works or grammatical rules.

Students trained through this method usually lack communicative competence. They know the rules of the language but are unable to use the language appropriately in different situations. Many schools have come to realize the weaknesses of the traditional teaching method. In order to help students develop speaking and listening ability, a number of teaching methods have been introduced into English classrooms in China. Among these methods, audio-lingual and direct methods are widely used at the beginning level. Grammar-translation still dominates the teaching of English at a more advanced level. At present, there is a great diversity of teaching approaches in English classroom, but the primary reliance is still on grammar-translation activities.

In recent years, a growing number of foreign teachers have been to China to teach English there, taking with them new teaching methods and teaching materials. This trend has produced a strong effect on China's improvement in teaching methodology. EFL teachers in China have gradually realized the recent development in English teaching methodology. Structure-situationl, communicative and functional-notional approaches have been introduced to many language institutes in China. More attention is being given to cultivating students' ability to use the language rather than to know about the language. Considering that the Chinese learners are learning English in a non-English-speaking environment and their needs to learn the language are quite different from ESL learners in some other countries, some colleges have combined various kinds of teaching methods to suit the students' specific needs.

The Shanghai Foreign Language Institute, for example, has conducted several experiments on the improvement of teaching method. Both Ai (1982) and Zhang (1983) described their personal experiences in teaching experimental classes there. A kind of "middle-of-the-road" method -- combining the audio-lingual and the communicative methods -- was used in classrooms. This approach not only improved students' speaking skills but also made them become

more aware of the target culture.

Change is not an easy job -- teachers in China often find it difficult to carry out the improvement. Apart from their limited knowledge of teaching methodology, Chinese teachers also lack the knowledge of the target culture and the communicative competence of the target language. Most teachers learned the language in a pure Chinese setting. They have never had the chance to talk with native speakers, and had little access to foreign publications. Since many new teaching methods demand that the teachers have native speaker fluency, a relatively good knowledge of the target culture and a great deal of pre-class preparation, many teachers may feel afraid to try these new methods.

In matters of teaching methodology, due to the lack of systematic training of theory or practice in this field, Chinese teachers are still learning. Generally speaking, most teachers are open-minded and ready to learn new things. However, they are not ready to make radical change. Grabe and Mahon (1981) based on their experience of teaching in China, found three main reasons for this phenomenon. For one thing, the traditional teaching method has been successful in turning out very good English speakers. (I will discuss some of the reasons in the part on "learners".) Second, nationwide or university-wide tests in China consist mostly of close analysis of selected texts -- teachers are afraid that a radical departure from the traditional approach in their classes would make their students alienated from the majority and fail in these tests. Third, teachers have limited influence on educational policies. Even if they want to try some new methods, the supporting structures may not be albe to assist their experiments. Usually, Chinese teachers are more interested in making some gradual changes in teaching methods than a great change, which will not isolate their classes from other classes in the school or require them to have native speaker proficiency. In other words, if the success and effectiveness of the methods are quite evident, most teachers are willing to try.

While discussing the problems in teaching methodology, we should also be aware of the practical situation in China. Some foreign teachers, although being very enthusiastic about their work, have failed to bring about a great change in China's EFL teaching, some even had difficulty in carrying out their classroom teaching. Brennan and Miao (1982) noted that there is a considerable number of constraints in China's classroom, which makes it almost impossible for foreign teachers to use some teaching methods that are successful in the West. Influecned by the Chinese values and customs, students regard a teacher as an authority figure. They expect the teacher to provide them with the answers to all the questions rather than assuming that they themselves can contribute a little in solving the problems. In addition, the passive role students usually take, the social customs of remaining quiet in the classroom, and the shyness of some students affect communication in classrooms. In order to carry out teaching successfully, a compromise on both sides is needed.

Most teachers look at the matter more optimistically; it is not a simple matter of compromise but a matter of better cross-cultural understanding and communication. Because of the different cultural and social background, Chinese and foreign teachers may have different views on how to carry out the classroom teaching. Lack of mutual understanding and support may cause a failure in the teaching and great disappointment on both sides. Patrie and Daum (1980) pointed out that a direct transfer of teaching methods from the West to China is inappropriate, because the quality expectations are not the same from one system to another, and the standards of good and bad education are not absolute, but reletive to time and place. In summery, the key to the success in the imporvement of teaching methodology lies in a better understanding of the Chinese learners' needs and a better cross-cultural communication between the Chinese and foreign teachers.

Teacher Training

Teaching training has always been regarded as an important issue in most Western nations. In recent years, with the growing number of ESL programs, teacher training has been much more emphasized than in the past. China has also realized the importance of improving the quality of its English teachers to ensure a better development in its English education. Some of the measures taken by the Ministry of Education include: 1) encouraging teachers to learn from their own experiences and continue their study on the job; 2) offering more courses at the graduate level to teachers; 3) sending some teachers abroad to study the language and the culture; and 4) inviting foreign ESL specialists to help conduct teacher training courses in China (Wang, 1982).

Most teachers teaching English in China's colleges have received their preparation for teaching at teachers' colleges and universities, or at language institutes. However, the curriculum for most English majors at the college level emphasizes the development of English language skills. Most schools have no special courses of methodology for future teachers. As a result, most teachers have to learn how to teach on the job, following the model of senior faculty or the way they have been trained as students in college. This is one of the reasons why the traditional grammar-translation method is widely-used in China today.

Since Chinese teachers have had little exposure to Western language teaching theory and techniques for many years, some improvement in teaching methodology comes from their long period of experiment and experience rather than through a systematic theoretical study. Obviously, this is not an efficient way of making improvement.

On the other hand, as it is mentioned before, most Chinese teachers have had few, if any chances to talk to native English speakers or learning about the outside world beyond China's borbers. They lack the native speakers'

proficiency in using the language. Their background knowledge of the language, Western geography, history, religion and current events is also limited. In addition, the changing political situation in China before 1976 disturbed most teachers' teaching and their own study of the language.

In order to improve EFL teaching in China, it is urgent to improve teachers' knowledge of the target language, the target culture and the language teaching theory and methods. The Ministry of Education in China has invited several teams of ESL specialists from different English speaking countries to conduct teacher training courses for English teachers. Most of these courses cover a period of 3-6 months. During that period, trainees, mostly English teachers at colleges, are introduced to recent theory and practice in second or foreign language teaching. At the same time trainees go through language training to improve their language skills. In addition to these teams invited by the Ministry of Education, many foreign teachers are invited by various colleges in China to help conduct training courses for the teachers in that particular college.

One of the common problems most foreign trainers have experienced is that the trainers and trainees usually have different expectations of the program at first. Most foreign teachers have worked out a carefully conceived plan for the program before they go to China. The plan is mainly based on the trainers' experience in training ESL teachers in Western nations. Attention is given to the improvement of trainees' knowledge of linguistics and teaching and research methodlogy (Grabe & Mahon, 1981, 1982; Johns, 1983; Patrie & Daum, 1980). However, once the program starts, most foreign teachers may find that the plan can not satisfy the Chinese trainees' needs. Most trainees are more concerned about improving their ability in using the language rather than conducting field research or theoretical study in linguistics. On the other hand, the trainees' ability to understand the language and the culture

has virtually limited their success in learning complicated theories and methods. As a result, most foreign teachers have to revise their plans for the training programs so as to meet the practical needs of the trainees.

Grabe and Mahon (1982) described their experience in offering a teaching training course between 1980 and 1981 at the Shanghai Foreign Language Institute. They gave special consideration of the improvement of the trainees' language proficiency and knowledge of American culture while introducing the new teaching methodology to the trainees. By using American films, news broadcasts, newspapers and periodicals as their teaching materials, they not only helped the trainees improve their English communicative competence and their knowledge of the American culture but also demonstrated various kinds of teaching methods in the classroom.

A method used in another training course for ESP teachers was asking trainees to analyze the textbooks with which they were teaching at different colleges. Under the guidance of the foreign teachers, trainees conducted research through discourse analysis of their textbooks. They learned how to conduct research in the EFL field and produced data-based papers. At the same time, they also understood their teaching materials better, which could be used immediately after they went out of the training program (Johns, 1983).

As discussed above, most times cooperation between the Chinese and the foreign teachers can be achieved through an effort to understand each other across the cultural boundaries. This cooperation makes most teacher training courses successful, which has contributed a great deal to the improvement in China's EFL teaching. Sometimes, however, due to the lack of mutual understanding, the disagreement in the interpretation of objectives, unclear educational policies, limitations in support structure and bureaucracy, some teacher training programs are less fruitful than expected. This failure is a natural phenomenon in the process of change and development. Both the Chinese and the foreign teachers need to look at this phenomenon more objectively. The long period of separation has naturally resulted in a lack of understanding of the different

cultures. But if the exchange program continues, the temporary misunderstanding will gradually be eliminated.

Despite the existing problems, the growing exchange between the Chinese and the foreign teachers and the growing awareness of the importance of teacher training in China have certainly promoted the development of China's EFL teaching. Once a better understanding is achieved and some of the obstacles are removed, the teacher training program will be more successful in the days to come.

Learners

One of the most significant improvements in second language teaching is that more and more attention is given to the learners: their learning process, their learning strategy and their needs. Since the ultimate aim of second language teaching is to help learners use the language, learners should be the most important factor to be taken into consideration in teaching planning and organization. To understand some of the problems affecting China's EFL teaching, we need to have a look at the social, cultural and language factors which may influence Chinese students learning English.

As mentioned before, English teaching starts at the elementary level and continues at secondary and college levels. Students are supposed to have a command of basic English vocabulary and grammatical structures when they graduate from high school. Owing to various reasons such as the teachers' quality and the students' attitude and motivation, high school graduates' command of the English language varies a great deal. Since only a small percentage -- approximately less than 10% -- of high school graduates have the opportunity to go to college, the students admitted are usually the most successful ones in their high school academic work. Most students are

interested and highly motivated in learning their subjects in colleges.

In China, once a student is enrolled in a program, he usually cannot change his major. In addition, the student will work in the field which is his major in college after his completion of the program. As a result, most Chinese students are highly motivated, because how well they learn the subject determines how well they can do in their future work. Most English majors do not mind spending several hours a day doing boring pattern drills or difficult translation exerciese. They expect and welcome a large quantity of homework. This may explain, to a certain extent, why the traditional teaching method can turn out good English speakers. Students who are not majoring in English also pay attention to their English skills. Since China has an urgent need to learn the advanced science and technology from the Western nations, a student with a good command of English will usually get more opportunities of working for research institutions and receiving further training than a student who does not have English skills. In sum, most college students in China are highly motivated and hard working.

Most students have formed their learning habits when they enter college. It is helpful to know the learning habits of the students. Literacy in the Chinese language is taught in elementary school. By the 3rd grade, children are learning to use phrases, an important part of rhetoric in the Chinese language. Phrases, mostly classical and usually of four characters, replace wordy descriptions or explanations. Much secondary school reading is in the classics, which is quite remote from the modern Chinese. Writing at this level aims at verse and elegant semantics. This language background is reflected in Chinese students' learning English. "Chinese students are concerned with elegant expressions; they avidly collect phrases, not recognizing which are trite. They often mistake convolutions for elegance

in grammar, but have trouble really learning how best to utilize phrases and clauses" (Wood, 1982; p.11).

This kind of learning style also causes students to spend too much time on few books, learning and memorizing every word, rather than reading extensively. The exposure to native English speakers and the outside world is quite limited for most English students. This learning style has limited their knowledge of the Western culture even more. Usually, students know extremely little about Western culture, geography or society. Some topics concerning Western culture may cause great confusion in a Chinese classroom.

Another problem foreign teachers and researchers have found is that Chinese cultural and social background may influence students' understanding and interpretation of some topics including some universal topics (Matluck & Matluck, 1975; Matluck 1979). Some foreign teachers teaching English in China found that even the simplest concepts in education have different interpretations between the Chinese learners and foreign teachers (Maley, 1983). If teachers are not aware of the differences, difficulties may arise in teacher-student communication.

The Chinese culture also emphasizes good manners and respect for the teacher and the aged. As a result, students' conception of the teacher-student relationship is quite different from the West. Students regard the teacher as an authority figure. They respect and keep a distance from the teacher. If some teachers and students want to establish a closer relationship, some confusion might be caused. The traditional value also requires a student to behave properly in a classroom. Any student talking freely, talking to teachers while seated, or taking a seat before the teacher permits is usually considered as a bad-mannered and impolite student. This kind of traditional values has posed difficulty for a language learing classroom which needs students' active participation in discussion. In recent years, many language teachers have been trying to change this phenomenon by

encouraging students to speak in class. Many language classrooms are less rigidly set than before. At the same time, the society and cultural values are changing, young people are more open than the older generation. However, the traditional values are still influencing the students in many subtle ways.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the history of English teaching in China. The history has demonstrated that a country's social and political change determines that country's education policy. The language change is usually a result of social change. On the other hand, language change can also promote soical change. English study has promoted China's economic development and social transformation in many aspects, especially in the modernization program.

This paper has also discussed some of the existing problems in China's English teaching, especially at the college level. These problems are obstables to successful language teaching and learning. It is quite clear that there has been a great deal of improvement in China's English teaching since China started its modernization movement and expanded its contact with other countries. In the process of development, some old problems have been solved, while some new problems have arisen. Some problems which seem unsovable today may be soleved tomorrow. If the Chinese persist in the policy of opening the door to the outside world and learning the strong points from other countries, a better understanding between the Chinese and people from other countries and a faster development in China's education and economy are possible.

While analyzing the problems, it is important to strongly bear in mind that China's long history, cultural values, present social structure and political ideology have made China a different country from Western countries.

what is workable in western countries is not necessarily workable in China. There is a lot for the Chinese to learn, especially after so many years of isolation from what has been going on in the rest of the world. However, a direct transfer of everything from the west to China is bound to fail. Different approaches should be applied to different conditions to serve specific purposes. In China's English teaching, the most essential question for the Chinese teachers is still how to satisfy the needs of the Chinese learners by organizing teaching in agreement with the specific conditions in China. This is precisely the purpose of the paper to discuss the problems of English teaching in China's colleges.

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